



News from

# Congressman Ron Kind

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## Kind Speaks on the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Upper Mississippi River Refuge

*Subcommittee Addresses Public Access Within the National Wildlife Refuge System*

**WASHINGTON, DC** –U.S. Rep. Ron Kind (D-WI), a member of the House Resources Committee and the Subcommittee on Fisheries Conservation, Wildlife and Oceans, spoke today about the Comprehensive Conservation Plan (CCP) for the Upper Mississippi River Refuge. Kind's statements were part of overall remarks made at a Congressional oversight hearing on public access within the National Wildlife Refuge System held by the Subcommittee.

“Mr. Chairman, I want to thank you for holding this hearing today so this Subcommittee can explore the questions on why certain refuges are closed to the public and why certain activities are not permitted within our National Wildlife Refuge.

“Public access to our refuge system is of particular importance to me. Since the first refuge was established in my home state in 1912, the Wisconsin refuges have become an integral part of life for our citizens. Our five wildlife refuges and two wetlands management districts attract millions of visitors each year. They provide critical habitat for our state’s world-renowned wildlife resources as well as opportunities for recreation and ground-breaking research.

“In addition to the Necedah Wildlife Refuge, my district is also home to the Upper Mississippi River National Wildlife and Fish Refuge, whose 240,000 acres extend 261 miles southwards from Wabasha, Minnesota to just north of Rock Island, Illinois.

“The Upper Mississippi Refuge lies at the heart of an area that serves as a major migratory flyway for 40% of North America’s waterfowl. It provides habitat for some 292 species of birds, 57 species of mammals, 37 species of amphibians and reptiles, and 118 species of fish. Moreover, it is the most popular of all our National Wildlife Refuges, attracting roughly 3.7 million visitors a year – more, I am proud to note, than Yellowstone National Park. It is truly a beautiful Refuge to visit and I commend my colleagues on this panel to read the Sunday, May 22, 2005 Washington Post article entitled, *Following the Upper Mississippi by Land*, which paints a wonderful portrait of its beauty.

“This hearing, and the question of the appropriate level of public access in refuges, is particularly timely in that my constituents are currently weighing in on a draft Comprehensive Conservation Plan for the Upper Mississippi River Refuge.

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“As members of this Subcommittee know, the CCP is meant to establish new planning requirements for each refuge and clarify the standards and process used to regulate recreational and commercial uses. It requires that the "biological integrity, diversity and environmental health of the system is maintained for the benefit of present and future generations of Americans.”

“The U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has begun a series of 16 public meetings on the draft CCP designed to help people understand what is in the plan and weigh in on a preferred alternative. While it is early in the process, one alternative currently identified as the Service’s preferred plan for the Upper Mississippi Refuge, does seek to limit some public access and use, as a means to protect wildlife populations and habitat.

“For example, the preferred alternative would add six new no-hunting zones, bringing the total to 13. The number of areas closed to waterfowl hunting would go from 15 to 21; and overnight camping and mooring of boats would be limited to islands and shorelines bordering the Mississippi’s main channel.

“The proposed CCP, especially the preferred alternative that would reduce some of these traditional and cherished activities in the Upper Mississippi River Refuge, has created a strong turnout by the public offering their feedback.

“My concern for the curtailment of public access and use of the Upper Mississippi Refuge comes not only as a sportsmen and avid user, but as a proponent of the landmark National Wildlife Refuge Improvement Act of 1997. As this Subcommittee knows, the Improvement Act reinforced the importance of wildlife-dependent recreation in our Refuge system to include hunting, fishing, wildlife observation and photography, and environmental education and interpretation.

“These have been commonly referred to as the “Big Six” uses of our refuges. This law further stated that these uses are to be given priority consideration over other uses under new requirements for comprehensive planning and determinations of compatibility. In addition, this Subcommittee has heard complaints where individuals have been denied the opportunity to undertake a certain activity in a Refuge that is allowed on similar federal lands without any apparent adverse impacts on existing wildlife resources. So, while we must act to ensure the future viability of healthy populations of wildlife and their habitat, we must be careful to balance those actions with unwarranted restriction on the public’s use.

“Mr. Chairman and Ranking Member Pallone, I appreciate the opportunity to hear from our distinguished panel of witnesses today. I look forward to hearing their thoughts on these important issues.”